DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 046 912 TE 002 064

AUTHOR Wainwright, Gordon
TITLE Developing Reading Skills in Further Education.
PUB DATE 70
NOTE 3p.
JOURNAL CIT Use of English; v21 n4 p336-38 Sum 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *English Instruction, Reading Comprehension, *Reading Improvement, Reading Level, Reading Skills, Reading Speed, *Retarded Readers, *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Students with low reading levels in colleges of "further education" would benefit both personally and vocationally from a developmental reading program embracing three principal aims: (1) to increase the range of available reading speeds from 200-300 words per minute to 400, 500, or 800 words per minute without loss of comprehension; (2) to show students how to develop the flexible use of various reading techniques (e.g., skill in both skimming and study reading); and (3) to enable students to improve the quality of comprehension in their reading. For the effective implementation of these goals, a book-centered course--the simple combination of instruction, practice, and discussion--which encourages wide student reading is of more value than expensive equipment (e.g., teaching machines, training films, and tachistoscopic devices). (JMC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Use of English,
Vol. 21, No. 4,
Summer 1970.

# DEVELOPING READING SKILLS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Chatto and Windus and author
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

*by*

GORDON WAINWRIGHT

West Park College of Further Education, Sunderland

ED046912
TE 002 064

TOO MANY students in further education are semi-literate. Reading ages, for example, can be as low as eight or even seven. As a result students' progress in their vocational studies is restricted and retarded. As more and more firms press an increasing number of young workers into schemes of industrial training and further education, the problem will become more noticeable and more serious. It is time that an effort was made to improve matters before they deteriorate irrevocably.

The worst effects of these deficiencies are seen in colleges with a technical bias. Here, many young men and women who have been rejected both by secondary education and the white collar sections of business and industry, find themselves receiving instruction for which they do not really see the need and which they do not fully understand. Many of their difficulties can be traced directly to the fact that they cannot read well enough to make the learning process easier. If the development of reading skills were to become an established part of English and liberal studies work in colleges of further education, many of these young people would be able to benefit more from their training and, through this, to improve the quality of their contribution to the work of the industry which they are entering.

A developmental reading programme in a college of further education would seem to have three principal aims. Firstly, it would be necessary to use the approaches and techniques which have been well tried in rapid reading courses for adults to show F.E. students how to increase the range of speeds available to them in reading. Faster reading will not in itself, of course, bring better reading, but neither will it automatically result in poorer reading. There is evidence which suggests that speeds in reading can be increased from students' initial maximum speeds of 200-300 words per minute to maximum speeds of 400, 500 and even 800 w.p.m. without loss of quality of comprehension. There is also some evidence that 200 w.p.m. is in many ways a minimum useful reading speed and that below this figure many



Copyright Chatto and Windus 1970.

difficulties are created simply because information is not processed quickly enough to be intelligible as a logical whole.

Secondly, it would be necessary to show students how to develop flexibility in their use of various reading techniques. With the worst cases the approach would have to be much more of a remedial one, conducted by specially qualified staff. But with the bulk of further education students, the development of greater speed in reading could be associated with increasing skill in using skimming and study reading techniques. Many students are completely lacking in method when it comes to studying and this must be considered a contributory factor in their failure to handle reading materials satisfactorily at college. Skimming is not the same as reading, of course, but it is a valid reading technique which we all use. Students can be taught to make appropriate and effective use of skimming skills and there is no reason why this kind of instruction should not form part of a developmental reading programme.

The main aim, of course, would be to enable students to improve the quality of their comprehension in reading. There is no easy or simple method by which this can be achieved but the provision of practice in reading and a continuing encouragement to students to exercise their reading skills will help. Showing them how to increase the range of reading speeds available to them will also help, since many students are deterred from reading because they find it such a slow and arduous task. The directing of attention to the act of reading, which a course involves, and a consideration of the techniques of effective reading helps to create attitudes of mind which may result in improvements of quality of comprehension. Continual testing of reading comprehension in the classroom is a further aid to improvement, as there are few measurable ways of assessing comprehension in most day-to-day reading situations outside the classroom, and many students are completely ignorant of the extent of their deficiencies until tested. On these bases, students may gradually be led to become more systematic and critical in their dealings with the written word and thus the quality of their reading comprehension will begin to improve.

Study reading presents special problems because it involves more general questions of study technique. Most further education students, of the kind who can benefit most from a developmental reading programme, have come from secondary modern schools, and many of these will have left school at the age of fifteen. They do not have the background of systematic, independent study which the more academic child tends to acquire under the pressure of working for 'O' and 'A' levels. They need to be taught how to study, without any attempts to make academics out of craftsmen or technicians. Simple principles of work planning, syllabus interpretation, note-

making and examination strategy need to be integrated with the development of skill in reading critically and carefully. It is usually possible to do this if it is shown that a more systematic approach will improve 'productivity' in studying.

Many teachers mistakenly assume that, if they are to make a serious attempt to improve students' reading skills, they will need a great deal of expensive equipment. Teaching machines, training films and tachistoscopic devices (which flash words and phrases before the reader at ever-increasing speeds) are available, but there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that film—and machine—centred reading improvement courses are more effective than book-centred courses. No teacher should be misled into thinking that he will have to submit a weighty requisition before he can embark upon a developmental reading programme. A simple combination of instruction, practice and discussion will produce worthwhile results. Encouraging students to read more widely and to develop a liking for reading will provide the background atmosphere to a course which will increase the effectiveness of these methods.

The content of the instruction given in a reading course need not be exhaustive. Many tutors would argue that, if students can be helped towards more positive attitudes towards the act of reading and provided with plenty of interesting and varied practice material, this is enough in itself and the effects of any instruction given about the nature of the reading process may well be negligible. It is necessary, however, to describe and, if possible, find some means of demonstrating the use of techniques such as skimming and studying. It should be within the capabilities of any tutor, who is himself an efficient reader, to find methods of doing this which can then be practised by students. Some time should also be spent in the analysis of passages so that students can be shown how to read critically. Some other considerations which should be borne in mind are the importance of keeping careful records of progress so that students can see how much they are improving, the desirability of keeping course numbers as small as practicable to make individual tuition possible, and the need to keep the course to a reasonable time limit so that students do not become bored with the work.

In this way, students can benefit both personally and vocationally from a developmental reading programme and at least some of the costs of the current neglect of students' reading skills can be avoided. No longer can we afford to allow reading to remain a subject which is only taught in primary schools, and the kind of approach outlined here at least enables us to attempt to remedy the situation at the further education stage without becoming involved in increases in expenditure.